

Dear Senator Slap, Representative Elliott, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Laurel Peterson and I am a professor of English at Norwalk Community College. I am here today to testify in support of HB 5300, *An Act Requiring Legislative Approval For the Merger or Closing of Institutions Within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities and Prohibiting the Consolidation of the Regional-Technical Colleges*. This bill provides necessary legislative oversight of any merger within the CSCU System, a power that the Legislature used to hold. Oversight is needed. In order to demonstrate a financial savings, the System is cutting from the bottom level of staff while adding to the top layer of management, creating a staffing crisis at the colleges.

In the English department at NCC where I've taught since 1998, our department has shrunk from 13.5 to 6 full-time staff members—**more than half our members are gone**. This means more work is done by adjunct labor; jobs like department chair have been done by one person for many years (exhausting for that person); representation on the college senate has been reduced; and our ability to engage students in a subject critical to their success is challenging because we don't have the same ability to reach students through programs and events.

When we were staffed at max, the English department offered a literary magazine, a reading club, a monthly movie night and discussion, and an annual writers conference. When we added the women's studies program to the department, we also offered a women's studies' conference and many events around that subject. We ran a reading series that brought in professional poets and fiction writers; we had an annual student reading for the literary magazine, and we hosted a social justice event focused on writing that was partly organized through PEN International. None of these things, except the literary magazine, remain.

In addition, programs such as developmental writing are being cut or severely curtailed. Thus, students are less prepared to do college level writing and reading, and fewer are passing than ever before. This is heartbreaking.

Prohibiting the consolidation and dissolving the central office would pull resources back into the individual colleges, allowing us to hire the faculty we so desperately need. We also need **younger faculty and more diverse faculty** in our department to reach the many black and brown students we serve. An expanded number of faculty allows us to create more English-focused programming to help students see how these skills are transferable and useful in their careers and lives, and helps us to create a college environment that promotes lifelong learning.

System officials first discussed the consolidation as a plan to save. When there was pushback, only then did they say it would also help students. However, any positive benefits from the consolidation, such as seamless transfer, can be done without the merger. This is nothing but a restructuring that adds many new administrators while cutting staff that works directly with students.

Help protect the Community Colleges. The students who attend are overwhelmingly from Connecticut and will stay in Connecticut to live and work. Community College students are

majority black and brown, working-class students. Real equity would be giving these students every opportunity to succeed by investing more in their education, not trying to save money by cutting the staff and resources that directly serve them.

Thank you.

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